



STATE OF WASHINGTON
COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS
COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

Centralia Meeting Minutes
March 12, 2009

Roll Call:

Commissioners present: Idalia Apodaca, Jorge Chacón, Ty Cordova, Henry Cruz, Rosa Fernández, Gilberto Mireles, Felix Negrón, Lillian Ortiz-Self, Rosalba Pitkin, Lourdes Portillo Salazar, and Manuel Villafán.

Staff Present: Uriel Iñiguez, Alicia Luna, and SMU Interns

Chair Portillo Salazar called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

Commissioner Cordova informed the audience that the meeting would be conducted in English; Commissioner Pitkin translated the message to the Spanish speaking attendees.

Roll Call was taken: All Commissioners were present.

Host Commissioner Negrón welcomed the community of Centralia, key guests, attendees, and panel participants.

Jim Walton, Centralia College President welcomed the Commission and invited the Commissioners to visit the Diversity Tower where Tomas Villanueva and Phyllis Kenney are honored.

Mayor Browning also welcomed the Commission; he stated that he was pleased to have them in Centralia and thanked them for their hard work.

Host Commissioner Negrón proceeded with introduction of the panel members as well as others from the community which included: Emil Pierson, Jesse Justice, Marisa Piñeda, Ross McDowell, Jose Diaz and others.

Certificates of appreciation were presented by Commissioner Negrón to Brenda Navarra, Maria de los Angeles Torres Solana, and Centralia Community College.

Director Iñiguez and Commissioner Negrón went over CHA's priorities and shared the following:

- CHA's Mandate and accomplishments
- WA State distribution of Latino population by county
- Lewis County, City of Centralia, and City of Chehalis Latino Population

210 11th Ave Suite 301A PO Box 40924 Olympia, WA 98504-0924
Toll-Free: (800) 443-0294 Olympia: (360) 725-5661 Fax: (360) 360-586-
9501

www.cha.wa.gov hispanic@cha.wa.gov

- ELL, Bilingual Education, and other education funds
- Projected growth of minority school-age population
- WASL scores & program funding for Chehalis and Centralia
- Lewis County Felony Convictions and State Juvenile Recidivism rates

Director Iñiguez stated that the city of Centralia had the highest Latino population in Lewis County followed by the city of Chehalis. He stressed the importance of Latinos participation in Census 2010. He also pointed out the small percentage of convictions amongst Latinos.

Panel Presentations

Commissioner Cordova informed the panel of the time limit on their presentations and the process for advising them when their time was about to end.

Commander Bob Willey, Operations Commander - Centralia Police Department shared the following

- Going through some difficult times; unemployment, major floods and snowstorms, and an increase in gang activity and meta-amphetamines
- Crimes were down, however, on the rise again
- In 2008, Centralia had less than 10% of crimes committed by Latinos, however, there is a 25% increase in assault, vandalism, and drug crimes by Hispanic adults
- 3 to 4 active gangs with 15 to 20 members; ½ of them are Hispanic
- Gangs are here and we need to deal with them; former gang members from California have come to Centralia to get away from gangs
- Drive-by shootings have increased because of gangs; not enough good solid models for youth

Dr. Steve Bodnar, Superintendent Centralia School District shared the following:

- School district has 3500 students: 5 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 1 high school
- Appreciated Director Iñiguez's comments on education; crosses all borders
- Believes in establishing relationships and introduced his staff
- Working on parental involvement and agrees with CHA's mission
- Recently had a parent advisory committee meeting with 45 in attendance

Steve Warren, Director of Teaching Centralia School District shared the following:

- They have a Migrant and ELL program
- America Smith is the ELL Director and Paz Hargrave is the Migrant Director

Tim Browning, Mayor shared the following:

- City of Centralia was founded by a minority; George Washington
- They are learning on how to deal with immigrants and begged all to get involved
- Federal & state programs work well if one is a property member; however, for low income & rent members resources are devastating; currently lots of kids living in cars and asked for CHA's assistance in this matter
- Would like to find a way to get additional bridges built between Latinos and Caucasians; need Latino leadership programs in the community and Latinos engaged in city council
- Education, Education, Education; keep putting the pressure on education

Polo Enriguez, Economic Development Director shared the following:

- Pleasure to see so many people come out to the CHA public meeting; he is usually the only brown face in community events
- His role is to assist businesses so that they can be successful; small businesses whether Latino or Caucasians have same challenges; money always difficult to get
- Language barrier is a great challenge; need bilingual services to talk about the product or service that is provided
- Martha Wright, currently working hard with him to address some of these challenges
- Hispanic business owners are not politically engaged
- Looks forward to a discussion with CHA

Public Comments

Lisa Seifert, President of the American Immigration Lawyers' Association of Washington (AILA) shared the following:

- Upcoming Citizenship workshop at Centralia College on April 18, 2009; Judith Aguilar is the site coordinator
- Additional information can be found at: www.ailawa.org
- Headed to DC next week to advocate for Immigration reform; asked that everyone get involved

Yesenia Mendez, Member of the Women's Circle for Justice and Peace

- Speaking on behalf of The Women's Circle for Justice & Peace; a group of nineteen Hispanic women of Centralia
- Have been fighting for nine consecutive years for justice and peace all across the state of WA
- Our issue today is "Housing"; the condition of many rental apartments and houses are not meeting the guidelines of the Landlord-Tenant Act/Housing Code
- What is the government doing to enforce the Landlord/Tenant Act and the Housing Code for private owned housing? Also why only privately owned?
- We believe that subsidized housing has more inspections done prior to renting and on a yearly basis than privately owned
- We bring it to your attention because there are families with small children willing to rent privately owned houses/apartments because it is rent they can afford
- Second question; Where can someone who does not want to jeopardize his or hers resident status go to report the deplorable conditions they are living under? Or do we ignore their cries?
- Our hope is to better the conditions of privately owned housing and to make you aware how this community is being affected by the state of the economy

Leticia Athena, Member of the Women's Circle for Justice and Peace

- Help us to obtain a number similar to the social security number
- We can't rent apartments only homes for low-income; rentals that are inferior
- Family members are stressed and sick
- People live in bunches; family members work double shifts to make ends meet thus we can't spend time with family and encourage them in their education
- Parental involvement is not possible
- Privacy is lost and health problems mushroom
- Thanks to Centralia College for the English classes that they offer

Jose Rodriguez, L&I Regional Administrador

- Oversees workers compensation, worker rights, and consumer protection
- Very active with flood issues
- Electrical inspections, worker safety, mobile home inspections, and hygienists that clean up hazardous waste
- Fees are waived to insure that they are responsive to needs in a timely manner

Cheryl Mercer, Centralia College Counselor

- There are many undocumented college students that are incredibly well qualified
- Need to form a network that can help these kids choose a field to go into that will get them hired

Gladys Romero, US Census Bureau

- Will be counting the population again in 2010
- Please do complete the questionnaire; remember that we all need to be counted; the federal government allots money based on population numbers
- Information is kept private no one sees it; just used for statistical purposes
- Will be hiring local people

Bella Mendez, Mental Health Counselor

- Budgets are being cut and clients no longer have mental health benefits
- Immigrants can no longer be served due to budget cuts

Martha Wright

- The Washington Hispanic Festival is held the last weekend in July
- Festival is an opportunity to address community issues
- Would love to help out with the housing issues that were brought up by the community

Elena Perez, Attorney General's Office

- Their office provides consumer protection
- Lots to do for Latinos; particularly from fraud such as Notarios Publicos
- Their website contains much content in Spanish; they also have pamphlets
- Their April campaign will be on auto financing & she is available to do workshops and presentations

Jose Piñeda

- Wife's brother moved to Centralia in September; lost his ID and has reported it
- Has been unsuccessful in getting a new ID due to request for further documents; how can CHA help

Manolo Saldivar, L&I

- Handles Occupation Safety and Health
- Believes that more advocacy is needed for Latinos in WA State
- All workers have a right to a safe working environment
- Take care of hazards at your job site and have safe lives

Tomasa Siguido

- She is a victim of violence; can she get legal residence status

- Needs assistance/information; her daughters are here and she needs to work to support them - she has nothing in Mexico

Jefte Frias, Director of Diversity

- Radio 91.3 provides 98 hours of programming; great vehicle to disseminate information
- TV programming to public access twice a month; production mid April
- Here to help the community

Conversation with Panel and Commissioners

Question posed by Education Committee Chair Lillian Ortiz-Self: Parental involvement is crucial; how is your district infusing this concept and outreaching to the Latino community?

American Smith response:

- We have lots of activities for Latinos which includes five meetings a year; the one last week was well attended
- We will expand next year and offer more than five meetings
- We also have outreach tutoring sessions at an apartment complex as well as ongoing activities
- Have Migrant Advisory Committee and Title I Leadership Teams
- Parent surveys are limited in various schools due to language issues

Steven Warren stated that they are trying to get better with their parent involvement plan. They also have family movie night which includes parents and teachers.

Commissioner Cruz: Commander Willey you mentioned that you have a gang problem; half of the gang members being Latino and 25% of crimes being committed by the Latino population so what is the city doing in regards to gang prevention and intervention?

Commander Willey's response:

- These numbers are somewhat deceptive; gang issues in June were consistent with drive by shootings, problems at school primarily not Hispanic
- Non Hispanic prejudices; self defense by Latinos against other non Hispanic groups
- School has an Officer and a strong Principal
- Gang Task Force does meet every month as well as quarterly to discuss issues

Commissioner Cruz: Who comprises the Gang Task Force?

Commander Willey's stated that the following were part of the task force:

- Sergeant and Juvenile Justice system, DSHS, Centralia and Chehalis School District, and Lewis County

Commissioner Cruz: How do you identify gang members?

Commander Willey's response:

- Look at who is currently incarcerated and becoming a leader of gangs
- Is graffiti moving; some graffiti is turf or a direct threat thus by monitoring we can know what activity is going on

- We can identify gang members by the graffiti

Commissioner Cruz: Are there plans to include parents and community members in the gang task force?

Commander Willey's response:

- We have thought about that but it does inhibit some areas
- I agree that parents should be involved
- Single parents are struggling to keep their kids out of gangs; if there were role models than kids wouldn't join gangs

Commissioner Negrón: Papers from school are sent home unfortunately they are only in English so parents can't understand; a concerned parent has missed important dates and meetings regarding her student.

Steve Warren's response:

- It's an issue for us, however, we are making an effort
- All safety material is translated into Spanish

Commander Willey stated that they have one records clerk, 6 to 7 volunteers and one Officer who are Hispanic.

Commissioner Chacón: There are very few bilingual teachers; do you plan on increasing the number of bilingual/Spanish speaking teachers?

Dr. Bodnar's response:

- I have recruited all over Washington state but not many candidates
- We are competing with folks from Texas and New Mexico

Commissioner Chacón: Any effort to involve parents and or a partnership with parents?

Dr. Bodnar's response:

- Reading Literacy, homework club, and assignments of 20 minutes of reading at Elementary level is celebrated
- Also a family math night; an experience with parents

Commissioner Chacón: I don't feel that this is creating a partnership with parents. The examples that you gave suggest that you reach out to parents but not the middle person.

Dr. Bodnar's response:

- Magic happens with the teacher and the parent; that is really where it happens

Steve Warren's comments:

- We have an improvement plan for every building
- We still need to work on getting more Latino parents involved

Chair Portillo Salazar asked for comments from panelists regarding housing and flood concerns such as condition of homes and social security numbers.

Mayor Browning's comments:

- We have substandard housing; will report it to the Community Development office
- The environment issue is a Department of Health issue
- We need to be less intimidating to Latinos
- Family that is flooded; cant' get into the apartment and loses deposit on both the apartment and utilities
- We need a simple pamphlet that provides information in Spanish so that they are aware that the lower income housing is in the flood area
- Housing Authority had two suggestions; Move them to Olympia or Longview which unfortunately is too far
- People have lived in hotels
- Federal disaster and paperwork is cumbersome
- No Spanish interpreter for forms, some forms are in Spanish but not all of them; trying very hard to provide all materials in Spanish to the Latino community

Chair Portillo Salazar: What are the barriers?

Polo Enriquez stated that the barrier is at the federal level; they sent a person from California who did not speak Spanish.

Commissioner Mireles: What are you trying to do to improve the lives of the Latino community?

Mayor Browning's response:

- If people think that they are not being heard that we aren't doing our job.

Commissioner Negrón: The County Sheriff can ask for advisory reports; some folks were isolated and not in communication. Don't wait for emergency services to come to you; as a community you need to take action.

Mayor Browning stated that every year they have learned more and they get better; this year the emergency group took action and no one was injured.

Dr. Bodnar stated that the Emergency Center has learned; there was a marked difference in regards to response during this last flood compared to the previous one.

Commissioner Villafán: Different groups get involved; is there a committee that gets together throughout the year?

Dr. Bodnar stated that yes; they (principals, police, firefighters, etc.) had all gotten together and put together an emergency plan. Copies were passed out at the meeting.

Commissioner Negrón: Has Centralia tapped into the rural areas?

Emil Pierson's response:

- There is \$391,000 for homes in foreclosure; they are buying the homes and renting to low-income
- Apartment complex available through the Catholic Diocese, however, won't be available until next year
- Also an apartment complex for low income housing that is not in the flood zone

- They have a website in Spanish as well as an informational kiosk

Commissioner's comments:

- People don't go to city hall looking for information; need to reach out to them perhaps in the churches
- Awareness issue; is loss mitigation information available in Spanish

Marth Wright stated that the city had tried to reach out and that they did all they could, however, there is room for improvement.

Commissioner Cruz stated that building bridges includes:

- Information on how to report housing code violations
- Forming of a gang task force; CHA can always assist you in getting community members involved

Commissioner Cruz added that DSHS budget cuts were a great concern; the mental health access not available to immigrants will be brought up at our meeting tomorrow with DSHS.

Steve Warren's final comments:

- We need programs that train and certify bilingual interpreters
- Title 2A; hard to find bilingual citizens going into the education field; perhaps if we offer scholarships or waive tuition

Commissioner Ortiz-Self stated that CHA is pushing for this measure in both the House and Senate. Director Iñiguez added that there are a number of bills in the House and Senate that address this issue; however, we need everyone to get involved especially for educators to call their Legislators.

Commissioner Chacón: What is your policy in regards to ICE and do your officers ask for legal status documentation?

Commander Willey's response:

- ICE does call their office for assistance but not all the time
- Fear among the Hispanic community is not happening anymore in this area; ICE only looking for those that have committed crimes
- Asked the community to not be afraid to come and talk to the local police; we are not going to haul up and take you in
- Not a policy to ask for immigration status

Commissioner Cruz stated that he is an immigration attorney and the fact is that fear of ICE is still there. The fear is prevalent throughout the state and although they seek felons the overall arrests are not felons' simply individuals who lack the documents.

Commander Willey's final comments:

- I am sure that it does happen and that the fear is still out there
- We don't see ICE knocking at our door telling us that they are doing a round up
- We can't live in that fear and grow; we need to meet in the middle
- We can't hide; that's no way to live

Chair Portillo Salazar urged all to call on their Legislators, offered CHA's assistance and referred all to our website: www.cha.wa.gov to obtain our contact information.

CHA Official Business

Approval of Everett Public Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Negrón made a motion to approve the Shelton public meeting minutes; Commissioner Ortiz-Self seconded the motion.

A vote was called to approve the minutes. Ayes were unanimous. **The motion carried.**

Commissioner Negrón made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Ortiz-Self seconded the motion. No discussion!

A vote was called to adjourn the meeting. Ayes were unanimous. **The motion carried.**

Meeting adjourned at 9PM!